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Idaho Transportation Department

Today's News Briefs

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Airport commission at center of dispute

LEWISTON - Attorneys for the city of Lewiston and Nez Perce County are preparing a response to a seven-page letter that claims conflicts of interest by some members of the Lewiston-Nez Perce Regional Airport Advisory Commission, City Councilor Thyra Stevenson said Thursday.

Stevenson, a former member of the advisory commission and now its council liaison, said during a meeting of the commission she expects the response to be released Monday by City Attorney Don L. Roberts and county Prosecutor Dan Spickler.

The lengthy letter is addressed to the city council and county commission and signed by V. Leroy Chausse of Lewiston. Chausse said in the letter that it was a collaborative effort by a group of citizens knowledgeable about activities and events at the airport, including those behind creation of a new board that will manage the airport. All others will remain anonymous, Chausse wrote.

"We have observed the tactics of Mr. (Jesse 'Skip') Heard, Mr. (Dick) Roberts and Ms. (Thyra) Stevenson, and are concerned about retaliation," he wrote. "Our allegations have been researched, and we believe them to be factual. However, they need to be investigated and resolved by an independent third party."

Those three discounted any statements made in the letter.

Heard said after the meeting that one claim - that he is a partner with Kent Simmons in owning a helicopter - is true. He refused to answer whether he also is a partner in a self-fueling business at the airport that is managed by Simmons, as the letter claims. Heard said he would answer any questions once the attorneys' letter is made public.

Simmons also is on the airport advisory commission along with Heard, Dick Roberts and Richard (Jim) Finley. All but Roberts have been named to the new authority board - Simmons by the city council and Heard and Finley by the county commission. Roberts was an applicant.

A fourth member, John C. Scott, is a retired certified public accountant and has no official connection with the airport, although he is a private pilot, as are the other three men. He also was appointed by the city. Under a proposed operating agreement, a fifth authority member will be named by the first four.

"There is concern that the fifth member, who will be appointed by the four existing members, will be Mr. Roberts, who continues to be in violation of (Federal Aviation Administration) regulations regarding the use of automotive fuel containing ethanol," Chausse wrote. The letter also charges that Roberts didn't have a business license for his flight-training school for several years.

Others of Chausse's charges are that the airport commission made or recommended changes to rules that were favorable to the self-fueling business and to Roberts' flight school, that Heard and the advisory commission were instrumental in changing management to an authority, and Heard, Roberts and Simmons have personal agendas that will be advanced by the authority.

He also alleges that Heard has exerted influence on the county commission through frequent meetings with individual commissioners and may have represented himself as speaking for the airport in meetings with the FAA.

"This document saddens me," Heard said during the advisory commission meeting. "There's a lot of insinuation, just wrong or incorrect and it particularly pains me because we all know Leroy (Chausse) and he knows when we meet and if he had anything bothering him he could have come here and said whatever he had to say."

Heard said he talked with Chausse earlier Thursday and expects him to attend the next advisory commission meeting so they can go over each item in the letter. The next regular meeting would be at 6:30 p.m. May 6 at city hall, although special meetings can be called.

The statements in the letter will be disproved and it will be embarrassing for Chausse, Heard said.